



# STRAIGHT WHITE MEN

BY  
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DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



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STRAIGHT WHITE MEN was co-commissioned by the Public Theater, the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University, Center Theatre Group, Steirischer Herbst Festival, Festival d'Automne à Paris, and Les spectacles vivants du Centre Pompidou. It was produced by Young Jean Lee's Theater Company (Young Jean Lee, Artistic Director; Aaron Rosenblum, Producing Director).

STRAIGHT WHITE MEN premiered in November 2014 at the Public Theater in New York City. It was directed by Young Jean Lee; and produced by Aaron Rosenblum. The dramaturgy was by Mike Farry; the associate director was Emilyn Kowaleski; the scenic design was by David Evans Morris; the lighting design was by Chris Kuhl; the costume design was by Enver Chakartash; with original music and remixes by Chris Giarmo, sound design by Jamie McElhinney, and movement by Faye Driscoll. The production stage manager was Stephanie Byrnes Harrell and the production manager was Chloe Brown. The cast was as follows:

STAGEHAND-IN-CHARGE .....	Elliott Jenetopulos
ED .....	Austin Pendleton
DREW .....	Pete Simpson
MATT .....	James Stanley
JAKE .....	Gary Wilmes

An earlier version of STRAIGHT WHITE MEN premiered in 2014 at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, with the same production team. The cast was as follows:

ED .....	Austin Pendleton
DREW .....	Pete Simpson
MATT .....	James Stanley
JAKE .....	Scott Shepherd

This version of STRAIGHT WHITE MEN was produced in February 2017 at Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago. It was directed by Young Jean Lee, and the artistic producer was Jonathan Berry. The dramaturgy was by Mike Farry; the associate director was Jessica L. Fisch; the scenic design was by David Evans Morris; the lighting design was by Sarah Hughey; the costume design was by Enver Chakartash; with original music and remixes by Chris Giarro, sound design by Jamie McElhinney, and movement by Faye Driscoll. The stage manager was Laura D. Glenn, and the director of production was Tom Pearl. The cast was as follows:

ED .....	Alan Wilder
DREW .....	Ryan Hallahan
MATT .....	Brian Slaten
JAKE .....	Madison Dirks
PERSON IN CHARGE 1 .....	Elliott Jenetopulos
PERSON IN CHARGE 2 .....	Will Wilhelm

## CHARACTERS

ED

DREW

MATT

JAKE

PERSON IN CHARGE 1

PERSON IN CHARGE 2

## NOTES

The pre-show music, curtain speech, and transitions are an important part of this play. They should create a sense that the show is under the control of people who are not straight white men. Despite this framing, the play should be performed sincerely and without irony.

Ideally, Person in Charge 1 and Person in Charge 2 should be played by gender-nonconforming performers (preferably of color). A good faith effort should be made to find such performers, but I'm open to variants depending on circumstances. If you wish to cast a particular cisgender performer who represents an especially marginalized group in your community (for example, Torres Strait Islander people in Australia), I am open to that. In no case should actors be cast to perform identities other than their own. Also essential: an abundance of natural charm.

The performers playing Person in Charge 1 and Person in Charge 2 should be empowered to say whatever they want to audience members when they're in the house before the show begins, and should feel free to ad-lib responses to audience members as necessary during the curtain speech. They should be given a voice in and veto power over all aspects of their roles, including costumes and performance style. It is essential that the performers be fully on board with their roles. Person in Charge 1 and Person in Charge 2

should be provided the power and support to have audience members removed from the theater should the actors deem it necessary.

Since Person in Charge 2 is a non-speaking character, the two roles can be combined into one if absolutely necessary. However, it is highly preferable to have a two-person team standing in solidarity. When there is only one, the character is more unfathomable and forgettable to the audience.

If possible, the stagehands should be female.

# STRAIGHT WHITE MEN

## ACT ONE

*Loud hip-hop with sexually explicit lyrics by female rappers plays during the pre-show. It's loud enough that people have to shout over it to be heard. The rumble of the bass makes the audience's seats vibrate.*

*A hyper-naturalistic middle-class family room glows invitingly onstage.*

*The room has wall-to-wall beige carpeting, taupe walls, and minimalist molding. Stage left, a linoleum-floored mud-room leads to a door to the garage. There is a storage bench next to the door with coats hanging on pegs above. On the storage bench is a pillow with a puffin printed on it. In front of the bench sits an ancient exercise bike. On the other side of the door is a closet containing a washer and dryer. Around the corner is a coat closet with a dart board on it.*

*Center stage is a taupe leather sofa, a matching easy chair, a dark-brown leather recliner with matching ottoman, a side table, and a large, battered wooden coffee table. The focal point of the room is an unseen television downstage center. Because of this, the wall behind the sofa is oddly bare—this is the wall that no one ever looks at when they're in the room. Against this wall are two matching bookcases packed full of old books, games, puzzles, and a component stereo system. Cabinets in the bottom of each bookcase store booze and glasses. Stackable clear plastic storage bins sit next to the shelves, filled with Christmas decorations and wrapping supplies.*

*Stage right is an unused fireplace flanked by two windows.*

*On the fireplace mantle are Christmas cards and a hand-crocheted, multiethnic Christmas nativity scene. Stockings hang above the fireplace. A small desk sits under a downstage window, its surface covered by Christmas ornaments and decorations that have been removed from nearby plastic bins.*

*Upstage left, three carpeted steps lead up and out through a doorway leading into a hallway. The hallway runs between an unseen kitchen and living room. A door to a half-bath is visible through the doorway.*

*As the audience enters, Person in Charge 1 and Person in Charge 2 patrol the theater. In the Steppenwolf production, they were both gender nonconforming people of color.*

*Person in Charge 1 wore a sleeveless, off-white, utilitarian jumpsuit with stylish red accents. The words “2 Cute 2 B Cis” were embroidered in red on the back of the jumpsuit. They wore black work boots and a belt with a pouch. Person in Charge 2 wore a glamorous navy satin jumpsuit with “WITCH” embroidered on the back in silver. They also wore one dangling silver earring, nude high-heeled pumps, and carried a fabulous gold clutch.*

*Person in Charge 1 walks systematically up and down the house-left aisle, scanning the audience for people who seem unhappy with the loud pre-show music. Person in Charge 2 does the same in the house-right aisle. Whenever they see audience members holding their ears or looking angry, they offer them individually packaged earplugs, which at Steppenwolf were kept in Person in Charge 1’s pouch and Person in Charge 2’s clutch. They listen to audience complaints about the music and explain that it’s part of the show and will end when the play starts. If that’s insufficient, they suggest that people wait in the lobby. They should find out if there are medical or psychological conditions that are being triggered by the music, and have a system for handling that. They never apologize for the music or say that it’s not in their power to turn it down. [You should make sure that*



*they do have the power to have the music turned down in case of emergencies.] If the performers deem it necessary, they can have audience members removed from the theater.*

*When the show is about to begin, Person in Charge 1 gets a wireless mic from the sound booth, and both Person in Charge 1 and Person in Charge 2 leave any clutches, pouches, etc. in the booth.*

*They go down the aisles toward the stage and step onto the stage in unison.*

*Music fades.*

*Throughout the following curtain speech, Person in Charge 2 makes illustrative gestures resembling those of a flight attendant while Person in Charge 1 speaks.*

*You should keep as much of the curtain speech wording as you can, but may adjust and/or add as necessary depending on who is giving the speech. In doing so, please try to maintain as much as possible the spirit of the original. You can swap out the name of the artistic director with someone whose name will be more recognizable to the audience, as long as the person identifies with a gender and is affiliated in some way with the production and/or the theater.*

PERSON IN CHARGE 1. Good evening ladies, gentlemen, and the rest of us. Welcome to [Name of Theater]. I'm [Name of Performer], and my pronouns are "they" and "them," My friend who's been handing out earplugs with me is [Name of Performer], and their pronouns are also "they" and "them,"

I see some blank looks. Okay, let me explain. To give you an idea of what I mean, if you were talking about [Name of Theater]'s artistic director [Name of Person] after the show, you would use the pronouns "she" and "her," For example: "She did such a great job programming this show!"

*Person in Charge 1 points at Person in Charge 2.*

But if you were talking about [Name of Performer] after the show,

you would say, “Their outfit was so cute! I wonder where they got it? I hope they’re at [Name of Nearby Bar] later so I can buy them a drink!”

*Person in Charge 2 taps Person in Charge 1 on the shoulder, and Person in Charge 1 tells the audience Person in Charge 2’s favorite drink.*

Before we begin the show, we would like to acknowledge that our pre-show music may have made some of you uncomfortable. And normally when you pay money, you can expect to feel comfortable. We are well aware that it can be upsetting when people create an environment that doesn’t take your needs into account.

As for those of you who liked or didn’t mind the music, please know that we deliberately set up our pre-show to cater to your experience. We wanted to make sure you’d feel welcome in this theater. Congratulations on your moment of privilege.

From here on out, everything will proceed as one might expect. All of the characters will be straight white men. Each of the actors will only play one character. They will stay in character and pretend not to see you, unless they hear your cell phone ring or see you taking photos or videos, in which case they may come into the audience and attack you.

[You can add any other information that needs to be given here.]

We hope you enjoy the show.

*A cheerful, acoustic-guitar-based instrumental track begins while Person in Charge 1 and Person in Charge 2 exit through the upstage doorway. Lights brighten until the room looks filled with sunlight.*

*Person in Charge 2 reenters, leading in Drew. They position Drew behind the sofa and cross his arms, posing him like an action figure. Drew is around forty and wears a red plaid hunting shirt, dark skinny jeans, and patterned socks.*

*Overlapping with them, Person in Charge 1 leads in Jake and seats him on the sofa. Person in Charge 1 hands Jake a video game controller and leans him forward in his seat. Jake is in his early forties, very fit, wearing a light blue oxford-cloth shirt, navy cashmere sweater, and well-tailored jeans.*

*Drew and Jake maintain intelligent but neutral expressions throughout.*

*Blackout.*

*In the darkness, we hear the sound of two Japanese video game characters (a motorcycle man and an old lady) challenging each other in Japanese. A female video game announcer's voice says, "Get ready, FIGHT!"*

*Lights up. Jake is playing a Japanese video game on the sofa, while Drew stands behind him looking on.*

*Silence while Jake plays and Drew watches.*

*Drew sings a verse of a childish, repetitive song, like "I'm a Little Airplane" by Jonathan Richman.\**

*Jake continues to play, ignoring Drew.*

*Drew sings the verse again, this time louder.*

*Jake continues to ignore Drew.*

*Drew taps Jake and says the name of the song.*

JAKE. That song doesn't bother me anymore. I'm immune to it.

DREW. Oh.

*Drew sits down in the easy chair, then sings the verse again. As he sings, he climbs onto the coffee table, obstructing Jake's view of the TV.*

*He holds out his final note, modulating his pitch higher as he sits next to Jake on the sofa. He launches into another round, but as soon as he sings the first word, Jake attacks him. They struggle.*

Ow! Fuck!

JAKE. Are you gonna stop?

DREW. Jesus, yes!

*Jake releases him.*

JAKE. (Going back to his video game.) You're a fucking idiot.

DREW. You're an idiot!

\* For information regarding this and any/all other songs mentioned in the play, please see page 74.

# STRAIGHT WHITE MEN

by Young Jean Lee

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When Ed and his three adult sons come together to celebrate Christmas, they enjoy cheerful trash-talking, pranks, and takeout Chinese. Then they confront a problem that even being a happy family can't solve: When identity matters, and privilege is problematic, what is the value of being a straight white man?

*"The signal surprise of STRAIGHT WHITE MEN, written by the ever-audacious Young Jean Lee, is that the play is not a full-frontal assault on the beings of the title. ... Ms. Lee's fascinating play goes far beyond cheap satire, ultimately becoming a compassionate and stimulating exploration of one man's existential crisis. Believe it or not, Ms. Lee wants us to sympathize with the inexpressible anguish of her protagonist, a middle-aged, upper-middle-class straight white man... [A] mournful and inquisitive play..."*

—The New York Times

*"A prime example of dramaturgical normcore—that is, experimental plays dressing up like fourth-wall family dramas—[STRAIGHT WHITE MEN] tickles your soft aesthetic underbelly, before easing in the knife of reality. ... If Lee wants to dissect the conscience of our society's most visible and powerful population, what better mode than living-room realism, sadly, our default theatrical setting? ... However, if you expect deconstruction-prone Lee to break down this form through surreal flourishes or screwing with the frame, you may be surprised. Most shocking is the absence of shock. She's too good a writer for the drama not to work on its own terms, and as such, the result is both emotionally satisfying... and unflinching in its critique of white-driven social justice."*

—Time Out (New York)

*"To cut to the obvious, STRAIGHT WHITE MEN is a loaded title. ... But the play turns out to have a disarming gentleness to it. Lee has more sympathy for her subject than scorn... STRAIGHT WHITE MEN is a family drama that on the surface looks fairly standard, but the play transcends psychological realism. Lee is wrestling with the meaning of straight white male privilege through characters who are self-conscious beneficiaries of an identity increasingly out of favor in 21st century America yet still, like it or not, in control."*

—Los Angeles Times

Also by Young Jean Lee  
CHURCH

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